

**SILENCE OF THE LAMBS - ULTIMATE EDITION**  
**COLLECTIBLE BOOKLET/INSERT WRITING SAMPLE**

## **HOW “SILENCE” CHANGED HISTORY**

When The Silence of the Lambs roared into theatres in time for Valentine’s Day 1991, critics fell in love all over again...with horror. USA Today raved, “A movie with this kind of haunting power comes along only once every decade or so.” But critics weren’t the only ones smitten. Based on Thomas Harris’ cult novel, the film devoured the box office, bringing in \$272 million worldwide to become one of the highest-grossing horror films in history. Soon it was clear that it was “one of those rare hits that resonates so well with the timbre of the times it can’t help turning into a social fact” (Movieline).

That couldn’t have been as thunderously underscored as when the horror thriller rewrote Academy Awards history the next year. For only the third time in history (after It Happened One Night and One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest), one film swept the “big five.” Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins were awarded Best Actress and Best Actor Oscars®, Jonathan Demme was named Best Director, and Ted Tally was honored for his screenplay (adapted from Thomas Harris’ novel). The evening’s pièce de résistance was the Oscar® for Best Picture, when Silence was met with resounding cheers.

But beyond the rarity of such a sweep, there were several factors that made the night all the more remarkable. First, it was first ever Best Picture victory by a horror film, traditionally regarded as a

less-than-elite genre. (Despite his iconic status, Alfred Hitchcock never received Academy recognition for his suspense masterpieces.) Secondly, Silence of the Lambs was released more than a year prior to the Oscar telecast, which meant that it had not been marketed as an awards contender. The film had long left the theaters by the time Oscar voting began, but clearly the “lambs” were still screaming.

Today Silence of the Lambs remains “one of the most influential pictures of the 1990s” (Boxoffice), possessing a timeless power to grip and terrify that few subsequent films can match. In his book The Great Movies, film critic Roger Ebert points out that “the popularity of Jonathan Demme's movie is likely to last as long as there is a market for being scared. Like Nosferatu, Psycho and Halloween, it illustrates that the best thrillers don't age.” Cementing the film's indelible appeal, the American Film Institute named Silence of the Lambs number 67 on the list of the Top 100 Films of all time.

## **ON THE TRAIL OF TERROR**

In preparation for the pivotal role of FBI trainee Clarice Starling, Jodie Foster, who had already won her first Oscar for The Accused, spent time with Special Agent Mary Ann Krause. “We went out to dinner and my first and lasting impression was that [Foster] was very sharp and eager to learn,” says Krause. “Not just about the FBI, but about me. She really wanted to get a picture of a female agent.” Foster then took her experiences with Krause directly to the screen. “When it gets to be too much, and I'm on my own, I just go

and cry in my car,” continued Krause. “In that one scene when she’s crying in the car? I saw it and thought, ‘Now that’s like me.’”<sup>i</sup>

To encourage the audience to identify with Clarice’s fascinating combination of strength and vulnerability, director Jonathan Demme decided to employ a classic Hitchcockian technique. “We had the camera do a complete subjective point-of-view shot for Jodie, without fail, in every single sequence,” he says. “People are always talking into the camera, the camera always sees exactly what she sees.”<sup>ii</sup> As a result of this subjective perspective, Clarice becomes the viewer’s guide – and emotional compass. She’s brave and stoic, but at the same time, she’s a rookie in way over her head.

As FBI agent Jack Crawford, Scott Glenn also researched his role with the help of the real-life agent: John Douglas, the renowned criminal profiler who interviewed such notorious serial killers as Charles Manson, the Green River Killer and David “Son of Sam” Berkowitz during his 25-year career and, in fact, was the basis for the Crawford character. During the process, Glenn found out more than he’d wanted to know when Douglas persuaded him to view crime scene photographs and listen to FBI tapes of girls who were tortured in the backseat of a Los Angeles van by a pair of rapists and killers. It was horrific stuff, but Douglas felt it was necessary.

“I thought it was important for him to sense that this is an extremely stressful environment,” Douglas says. “It’s the type of work you cannot shut down at the end of the day.” As a result of the experience, Glenn feels he “lost a certain degree of innocence.” He

reports, "I find myself having unpleasant dreams about the things I found out."<sup>iii</sup>

## THE LEGACY OF LECTER

Roger Ebert wrote in his 1991 review, "It has been a good long while since I have felt the presence of Evil so manifestly demonstrated as in the first appearance of Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs*." That seminal scene (in which Dr. Hannibal Lecter stands eerily still in his prison cell, sizes up Clarice with penetrating insight, and speaks with taunting precision), says Ebert, "is so powerful that it underlies all the rest of the movie, lending terror to scenes that do not even involve him."

Amazingly, Hopkins appears for only approximately 20 minutes of screen time – a record for the shortest screen time for a Best Actor winner – and still manages to create "a fiend for the ages" (Rolling Stone) with his "spectacularly unnerving" (The Hollywood Performance) performance. In 2003, an American Film Institute survey pronounced Hannibal the Cannibal the greatest movie villain of all time, beating out Norman Bates, the Wicked Witch of the West, Nurse Ratched and even Darth Vader.

Hopkins himself was unprepared for the household name status – and physical recognition – the part would bring him. He soon found he was walking around with the face of a flesh-eating serial killer. Upon checking into a hotel late at night in the mid-90s, he recalls giving the front desk clerk quite a fright. "She looked up

and saw me and said, 'Oh my God, it's you,'" Hopkins says. "Then she said, 'You're not going to kill me, are you?' And I said, 'Not tonight.'"<sup>iv</sup>

Looking back, Hopkins now acknowledges that Hannibal has become "almost like a mythic figure."<sup>v</sup> And like everyone else, he says, "I am interested in why Hannibal is such a phenomenon...an archetype."<sup>vi</sup> His explanation? "Hannibal Lecter is one of those creatures from the dark side of the human personality, which is always so attractive," he says. "He's self-governing, and he may tap into our desire to become like machines: to have no pity, to have no conscience. People are terrified to look at that aspect of themselves."<sup>vii</sup>

The hunger for more Hannibal has led to a well-received revival of the sinister yet urbane character in 2001's Hannibal and 2002's Red Dragon, both starring Hopkins and both earning hearty box office approval from legions of fans (both films grossed more than \$200 million worldwide). Beyond the direct sequels, the film has also fueled the public's appetite for a serial killer thriller subgenre that has produced such hits as 1995's Seven and 1997's Kiss the Girls.

With "the good doctor" remaining society's favorite example of evil incarnate, our demand for more may simply be insatiable – but thankfully, there will be no cause for starvation just yet. Thomas Harris is wisely feeding the mania with 2005's Behind the Mask, a prequel novel that examines Lecter's orphaned childhood in

Lithuania, and later France, and the reasons he turned to cannibalism.

## **BITE-SIZED TRIVIA**

- For the scenes outside Baltimore, Lecter was to have been dressed in orange, but Hopkins convinced the costume designer that a white shirt, white pants and white shoes would add a degree of clinical malevolence. Hopkins claims his inspiration was a childhood fear of dentists.<sup>viii</sup>
- There are several clues woven into the script. For example, in his first meeting with Clarice, Lecter describes the drawing in his cell as "the Duomo, seen from the Belvedere" in Florence, Italy. She later finds Buffalo Bill living in Belvedere, Ohio.
- Director Roger Corman, who mentored Jonathan Demme as a young filmmaker, appears in a cameo as the FBI Director while singer Chris Issak briefly appears as a SWAT team leader.
- Lecter's famously creepy slurping noise was an unplanned improvisation by Hopkins during the first take of his oft-quoted fava beans and Chianti speech. Demme loved it...and kept it.

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<sup>i</sup> People. April 1, 1991.

<sup>ii</sup> Interview. February 1991.

<sup>iii</sup> People. April 1, 1991.

<sup>iv</sup> Breithaupt, Jeff. "A real ladies man." The National Post. February 6, 2001.

<sup>v</sup> Portman, Jamie. "Look who's coming to dinner." Vancouver Sun. February 6, 2001.

<sup>vi</sup> "A Role to Sink His Teeth Into." [www.tiscali.co.uk](http://www.tiscali.co.uk)

<sup>vii</sup> "The Conversations: Leading Men of Hollywood". GQ. March 2000.

<sup>viii</sup> Timpone, Tony. Fangoria's Best Horror Films, p. 16